

Mr. Read's 7.
CASE:

Published for Prevention of **Scandal** to his
Brethren & People,

For Encouragement to Suffering
Protestant Dissenters,

For a Rebuke to their
Lawless Adversaries :

BEING

A Leading-Case how to deal with Such
Men; And a Practical Answer to Dr. *Stillington*,
and others, who Object against the Non-confor-
mists. *Why will you not do what you Confess to be Lawful?*

Humbly presented to Our **Governours**, in hopes of
their Forbearance towards Us, in such things as we Ac-
count *Sinful*.

LONDON, Printed for Richard Juxonway, 1682.



Mr. Read's

CASE:

Published for Prevention of Scandal to his

Brethren & People,

For Encouragement to Suffering

Protestant Dissenters,

For a Rebuke to their

Laws & Advantages:

BEING

A Leading-Case how to deal with such
Men; And a Practical Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet
and others, who Object against the Non-confor-
mists. Why will you not do what you Conscience
humbly presented to our Government, in hopes of
their forbearance towards Us, in such things as we Ac-
count sinful.

Mr. Read's Case.

THe general Mistake of People concerning Conformity and Nonconformity, and the mischievous consequence thereof, especially in regard to my own Case, doth necessitate me to give the world some account of it, that I may thereby endeavour to cure the Prejudice, and remove the *Stumbling blocks* that at present lie in their way: And the late rigorous execution of the penal Statutes upon *Dissenters*, contrary to the late Vote of the *House of Commons* at *Westminster*, hath put me upon many serious thoughts of heart, what may be done at such a time as this, to oppose the *Popish* design of introducing *Papery*, and invading of our *Property*.

As the destroying of *Religion* and *Property* is their end; so the reproaching, impoverishing, imprisoning, and ruining of *Protestants* by railing pamphlets, forging of Lies, suborning of Witnesses, encouraging mercenary Informers, presenting *Bishops Courts*, Excommunicating, &c. are the means for the attaining of these Ends.

But if People did consider, that as *Dividing and Destroying* is the work of *Papists*; so *Uniting and Healing* of breaches is *OUR* work, and would act accordingly in their several places, *THIS* would prevent our Popish adversaries in their Designs against us. Let us do what we can without Sin in *Obedience to Authority*, and then when it comes to the *Trial*, that we must either *Sin or Suffer*, it will be a great comfort to us, when we can truly say, that we have chosen to *Suffer*, rather than to *Sin*.

But if there be no Sin in the case, we must not expose our selves or people to sufferings. We cannot *suffer joyfully* the *spoiling* our *Goods*, the *confinement* of our *Person*, or the *ruine* of our *Families*; unless *Conscience* be able truly to say, *I would have done any thing but Sin against GOD*, that might have avoided these *Sufferings* from men.

It was the saying of a Reverend Minister Mr. B. of Worcester, when he lay upon his Death-bed, and was asked what thoughts he had of his Non-conformity? *I would have done any thing but Sin*, said he, *that I might have continued in the exercise of my Ministry: but when it came to that, there was no remedy*.

This Minister read the *Common-Prayer* in the Church, when the *KING* desired that the

they would read so much of it as they were satisfied in their consciences was lawful to be read, and a while after (on Bartholomew day, 1662.) turned out with the rest of his Brethren.

Many more read the Common Prayer before, and yet proved Nonconformists after; and if that had been all that had been required of the Nonconformists, to read the Ordinary Lords day Service according to the Liturgy & Practice of the Church of England, the most of the Nonconformists had continued in the exercise of their Ministry in Publick as well as others.

Whereas therefore the Ignorant, knowing us know not what Conformity or Nonconformity is, but account it offensive, if a Minister read the Common Prayer, or go to the Publick Church, and joyn with those that do read it, and are ready to refuse Communion with those Ministers or Churches who do it: 'tis high time to rectifie this mistake, & teach them better; lest by silence in these matters, the people run into the sin of Schism indeed. Not only to separate from those in the publick Churches, but from their own Pastors, when once they reduce their Principles into Practice, by reading so much of the Service as they approve of, and will suffer the Law.

I shall therefore desire All to take notice of three Laws made within these Twenty Years past, which the Nonconformists are sufferers by.

The first is the *Act of Uniformity*, requiring not only the Reading of the *Common-Prayer* (which in the *Ordinary Service* I believe most of us do account lawful) but it requires also, that openly and publicly we declare before the Congregation, *Our assigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained and prescribed in and by the Book of Common-Prayer, and Administration of Sacraments, and other rites and ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter, and the former Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.* And in the same *Act* it is required, that we Declare and Subscribe, that we will Conform to the *Liturgy of the Church of England, as it is now by Law Established*, besides what concerns the *Renouncing of the Covenant, and Re-ordination.*

There is a great deal of difference (let me note here) between *All* and *Some*; between Reading the ordinary *Lords-Days-Service*, and Approving the Book, and all that is in it. Mr. Baxter in his *Plea for Peace*, gives no less than Thirty particular Instances of several things in the *Common-Prayer-Book*, which

which the *Non-conformists* cannot declare their *Assent* and Consent unto. Such as will be at the pains to read them, may thereby understand that we are far from a full Conformity *Throughout*, notwithstanding the Censures & Reproaches of some against us as too Conformable, because we declare by our Principles, and Practices, that we can lawfully not only *Hear* Common-Prayer, but *Read* our selves; And yet though we cannot Conform to the *Law* by doing all it commands, we have manifested by our Peaceable Submission, that we can patiently suffer the Penalty it inflicts, *viz.* The casting us out of our Livings, and rendering us incapable of Church-Preferments for the time to come, with other Penalties there mentioned) until the King and Parliament shall see cause to relieve us.

Most of the Non-conforming Ministers who can with a good Conscience read Common-Prayer, and thereby secure themselves from the Penalty of the Conventicle-Act, cannot declare their *unreserved Assent and Consent to the Book and all that is in it*, they might have the greatest Preferments of hundreds or Thousands *Per annum* for their pains.

Another Law against *Non-Conformists* is that made at Oxford, (by some called the *Five miles Act*) restraining *Non-Conformists* from Inhabiting in Cor-

penalty whereof is fix months
 imprisonment, unless upon or before such Commis-
 sions, such Offenders shall before the Justice
 of the Peace, Swear and Subscribe this Oath fol-
 lowing: I A. B. do swear, that it is not lawfull
 any power whatsoever to take Arms against the King
 And that I do abhor that traitorous Position of taking
 Arms by his Authority against his Person, or against those
 that are Commissionated by him in pursuance of such Com-
 missions: And I will not at any time endeavour any altera-
 tion of Government in Church or State.

Many of the Non-Conformists have taken this
 Oath, being satisfied in the sense which all Law-
 yers that have discoursed do give of it, viz. that
 by Commissionated by him, we are to understand
 Legally Commissionated; and by Endeavouring any altera-
 tion of Government we are to understand it thus, that
 I will not endeavour it by any Seditious way, or Unlawful
 means.

In this sense I offered the Judges in open Court
 to take it (having before made the like offer to the
 Justices), but being tied up to the Words of the Oath
 and not having then advised with Lawyers and
 others about the Sense, as since I have done,
 did therefore refuse to take it, and suffered six
 months Imprisonment upon that account.

But being better satisfied about these things by

Paper called *The Sheriffs Case*, printed 1680. and again reprinted 1681 : And being further satisfied of the true sense of this Oath, by Mr. Corbets account of the *Non-conformists Principles and Practices* p. 11, and other writings of his not yet published : And especially being fully satisfied of the lawfulness of taking the said Oath, by particular Advice from Council learned in the Law, who better understand the meaning of Laws than we Ministers do, who have told me, that an *Illegal Commission* in law-sense is no *Commission* ; and that the Parliament cannot be understood to prohibit *Legal* officers to make any alteration of Government, but only such as are *Illegal* (for if so they should by their practice contradict themselves in the many endeavors that since they have made in a legal way) : And lastly, having received Instructions from the forementioned *Sheriffs Case*, how to declare our Sense of the said Oath, before, or at the time of taking it, in as publick a manner as we take it, that hereby we may avoid giving of scandal to others : And also being encouraged herein by Mr. Baxters words in the life of Mr. Ashurst (quoted also in the said *Sheriffs Case* printed 81.) naming those as *worthy Men* who did what he refused (speaking of *All* in the Corporation Act,

B

which

which is much more to be scrupled than this Oath alone) supposing that they in words or writing declared as openly as they swear, that they take it in such or such a lawful Sense, p. 48 : I say, upon these several Considerations I can Now with as good a Conscience take the said Oath, as formerly I did refuse it. And therefore in the sense as afore explained, and no other, (Delivering hereby my own Soul) I shall be ready, when call'd thereto by the Magistrate, to take the same in the words of the Act.

A Third Law made against Non-conformists is the *Conventicle Act*, made to prevent and suppress *Seditious Conventicles* : By the rigorous execution whereof, the People as well as the Ministers have bin great sufferers, though never any thing of *Sedition* could be Charged, much less proved against May or my Brethren that I can hear of.

Whether our many and great troubles upon this account are not *self-made* Troubles, or long of our selves, hath many times been disquieting to my mind.

About four or five years past, when the Informers & Officers were very troublesome to us, and had taken away the Goods of some of the Congregation, I told my People at a Meeting of

three Hundred of them, that I saw how unable they were to bear such Troubles and Losses, and that I could not be faithful to them, or to my own Conscience, without telling them, that though I were not fond of the Common-Prayer, having never read it in my life, yet it was my judgment, and most of our Ministers, that it was lawful to read it; and that by the reading of it they might be free from the penalty of this Law for the time to come, and therefore if they met with further troubles for want of reading it, they should blame themselves, and not me.

Some few were so weak, that for speaking those words, they never came within the Meeting-Place since that I can hear of: Some more (twenty or there about) were so much prejudiced against the using a Form of Prayer, that I found there was danger of making a breach amongst us; and that a new-gathered Congregation could not bear so great a shaking, till they were a little better settled. I did therefore for the sake of *those*, forbear to use it, contenting my self only, with reading the Scriptures, the Creed, Commandments, and the use of the Lords-Prayer.

And now at last, having first advised with my Brethren in the Ministry, who acknowledge the lawfulness of using of the Liturgy in the Ordinary Lords-Days, and with *Lawyers*, who tell me that the reading of it will prove the *Lawfulness* of our Meeting, and secure

us from any further trouble: I have therefore begun to read it, and upon proof thereof, by several Witnesses to the Grand Jury at *Westminster* this last Term, I brought in a Bill of Indictment against Justice Parry, Richard Toovey Distiller, John Pollard in *Parkers Lane* Informer, and several others for a Ryot, in breaking open the doors of my Meeting-Place, when our Worship was not in other manner than according to the Liturgy and Practice of the Church of England; And another Bill of Indictment for a Ryot against the said Justice Parry, Thomas Harris Cheesemonger, John Pollard Stephen Leucas the Smith, and others, for breaking open the door of my dwelling-House the Lord day before, where there was nothing of any Worship or Company to ground any pretence of an unlawful Meeting upon.

The said Jury have found both the Bills, and in due time I shall make further trial of this point at Common Law, whether They or I are the transgressors of it.

I am sensible that these things make a great noise, and the mouths of many are opened against me. The railings and threatnings of prophane Drunken Damnes I matter not: I do not Arrest them and Indict them, for doing their Office, as they are the Kings Officers, but for doing more than their Office: If they have done well, they shall have praise

the same. Possibly they may have the repeated
 of a *Middlesex Court of Justices*: But we know
 no Law is made for a *Righteous Man*, but
 the *Lameless and Disobedient*; for the *Ungodly*, and for
 ; for the *unholy and prophane*; For *Murderers*
Fathers, and *Murderers of Mothers*; for *Manslayers*, for
Foremongers; I may add, for *House-breakers*, and
Path-breakers; for *Prophane Swearers* and *Drunk-*
ards; for idle prodigal spend-thrifts that care not to
 their debts. Such persons as these, may
 and some others perhaps as Zealous for the ex-
 ecution of the *KING'S* Laws as themselves,
 Time will discover who are the *KING'S*
 Subjects.

But there is another sort, whom I am concerned to
 give all due satisfaction to; that is, to my *Brethren*
Ministers, who are not under the like circum-
 stances with me, and therefore may not think fit
 to do what I have done; and to my *People* among
 whom I have laboured near seven Years; not with-
 out good encouragement and success, and therefore I
 am very tender lest I should justly offend the one or
 the other. If there be any one then that shaketh the
 head, and saith, I wonder that Mr. Read should read
 the *Common Prayer*? I answer, which of you convin-
 ced me of Sin? If I have done Iniquity, I will do so
 no more; or If I have done evil, (in reading the Li-
 turgy)

turgy) bear witness of the evil; but if well, why
 dost thou thy Brother

I confess my Practice, is yet Singular, and per-
 the first publick instance of this nature in England
 far as I can understand: But the Principles on
 it is grounded, are undeniable, and far from the
 imputation of Singularity. Yea, and the Practice too
 using a Publick Liturgy, or form of Prayer in Pub-
 assemblies for the Worship of God; is of such uni-
 versal extent, that there are few Churches in the World
 without it, so far as I can understand.

The principles I go upon are such, as these.
 That obedience to the Magistrate in things lawfull
 duty. That a form of Prayer is Lawfull. That
 is the Pastors work upon good advice, to judge of the
 expediency of using such a form of Prayer, by the
 general rules of doing all to the Glory of God, edifica-
 tion of his People, and the publick good. That
 Communion with such Churches who use a form of
 Prayer is lawfull also, supposing they do not make
 any thing that is Sinfull the Terms of their Communion.
 Whether these Principles are not acknowledged
 found by the Brethren of all persuasions, and whether
 my practice be not agreeable to these Principles, I sub-
 mit to the Judgment of others.

Mr. Nye, a leading Man among our Brethren the
 dependents, hath proved it lawfull to hear a Parish Mini-
 ster

And Mr. Tombs, as eminent among the Anabaptists,
 Book to prove it lawful both to hear and com-
 mune with them; And his Practice at Salisbury was
 conformable thereto. Many of our Brethren here a-
 lready go to the Parish Churches, and hear Com-
 munion there, and some of them communicate with
 sometimes. The Non-Conformists both Ministers
 in many places, through the Land, go to their
 Churches, and maintain Peace and Love by
 Communion with them.

Many of our Brethren did read the Common Prayer,
 and they turned out of their Livings as I before
 said, and would they not be glad to read it again,
 and they might have the exercise of their Mini-
 stry and their Maintenance restored? And if upon
 terms they could read it at the Church (suppose
 at Bloomsbury) then why may not I read it in the Chappel
 in other Countreys by those in Worcester-
 shire I lived, I do verily believe there is
 many in ten, but would be thankful to God
 if they might be restored to their Livings
 doing only what I have done. Therefore thou
 merciful O Man, whoever thou art that judgest
 Brother. For that which thou judgest law-
 ful to be done by another, thou forbearst thy
 self, and because thou forbearst doing it thy self,
 thou

thou condemnest him. I will repeat this word only to my Bretheren. If there be Sin in the Call I shall choose to Suffer rather than Sin, as soon as I am convinced of it.

As for satisfaction to the Scrupulous and well meaning Christians among us, whose minds are so much prejudiced against the Public Ministry and the Way of their Worship, and therefore will not bear the use of the Liturgy of the Church in this Unexceptionable part of the ordinary Service but cry out against it as *Will-Worship*, *Antichristian*, *dolatry* and the like, I shall in General only say this much. If they will go to the Ministers of Christ, little Children, that is, as humble learners, willing to be taught; and by converse with them, and other understanding Christians, as also by searching into the Scriptures, and reading of good Books, will endeavour their Cure, or at leastwise the Abating of their Prejudice, doubt not but we shall quickly be more like-minded in these things. And if then they will lay aside Ambosities, and be so humble as to think soberly of themselves, and weigh the Judgment of those to whom they Consult, who better understand these things than they, it's like they will be more ready to Judge, or be Ashamed, of themselves, than to Censure me, and such as joyn with me.

In particular, next I must refer them to such Godly, Learned, Judicious, and peaceable Authors, as these hereafter mentioned, viz. Mr. Nye, Dr. Owen, Mr. Ball, Mr. Baxter, and Mr. Corbett, supposing they will be satisfied by what they have Published, when they will not by any thing I can say or write on this Subject.

Mr. Nye, in his Case considered, Whether it may lawfully becom the non Conforming Ministers, who are Re-ordain'd, and have renounc'd the Covenant, and some of them supposed to be scandalous in their lives? answers affirmatively, pag. 4. That it is a Duty that we should sometimes frequent (as we have liberty and opportunity) the more publick and national Assembly, and gives us this as one Reason, viz. That we are Members of Churches, so we are Subjects and Members of this Commonwealth, and are obliged thereby to observe

C

the

the lawful Commands of our Governours, and to be Examples therein to others.

‘ And again, p. 6. If Church Members, or any one Godly Man, hath a Warrant to forbear hearing such Ministers upon this account of unlawfulness, then all Godly Men ought at all times so to do; and if so the Examples of the Godly to the generality being very leading in the Matters of God, this Ordinance thereby will be little frequented; and of less Efficacy to those that do come to it; and by asserting it unlawful to hear such Ministers, we imply it were better for the Nation, there were no Preaching but in particular Churches; and if so, what can we expect will become of many thousands, in an ordinary way of Salvation, that have no benefit at all by our Church-instructions? We are to walk wisely, yea mercifully towards them that are without.

And

And towards the conclusion, p. 24. he tells us, That this is one of the mispersuasions of these latter Times, by which Mens Minds have been corrupted, that it is unlawful to hear in Publick, which I am perswaded (saith he) is one constant design of Satan, in the variety of wayes in Religion he hath set on foot by Jesuits among us. Let us therefore be the more aware of whatever tends that way.

Even Dr. Owen, who in his Discourse of the work of the Spirit in Prayer, writes against the making or composing of Forms of Prayer for our selves to be used privately, desires the Reader, p. 220. to observe that he doth not argue against Forms of Prayer as unlawful to be used; and, p. 222. he grants, that Men or Churches may agree upon a prescribed Form by common consent, as judging and avowing it best for their own Edification.

Again, p. 228. "Whether they are approved or disapproved of God, whether they are lawful or unlawful, we do not consider, but only whether they are for Spiritual benefit and advantage for the good of our own Souls, and the Edification of others, as set up in competition with the Gift before described. So that it seems the Dr. doth not judge such Forms of Prayer unlawful which are for the good of our own Souls, and the Edification of others, and which are not in competition with the Gift before described.

"And therefore (p. 231, and 232.) supposing that those who make use of, and plead for Forms of Prayer, especially in publick, do in a due manner prepare themselves for it by holy meditation, with an endeavour to bring their Souls into a ho-

ly frame of fear, delight and reverence of God; let it also be supposed that they have a good end and design in the Worship they address themselves unto, namely the Glory of God, and their own Spiritual advantage; the Prayers themselves, though they should be in some things irregular, may give occasion to exercise those acts of Grace which they were otherwise prepared for: And I say yet further, that whilst these Forms of Prayer are clothed with the general notions of Prayer, that is, are esteemed as such in the minds of them that use them, are accompanied in their use with the motives and ends of Prayer, express no matter unlawful to be insisted on in Prayer, directing the Souls of Men to none but lawful Objects of Divine Worship and Prayer, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and whilst men make use of them with the true design of Prayer, looking after due

“ due assistance unto Prayer, I do not judge
 “ there is any such evil in them, as that God will
 “ not Communicate his Spirit to any in the
 “ use of them, so as that they should have
 “ no holy Communion with him in and
 “ under them. Much less will I say, that God
 “ never therein regards their Persons, or re-
 “ jects their praying as unlawful : For the
 “ Persons and Duties of Men may be ac-
 “ cepted with God, when they walk and act
 “ in sincerity according to their light, though
 “ in many things, and those of no small
 “ importance, sundry irregularities are found
 “ both in what they do, and in the man-
 “ ner of doing it. Where Persons walk be-
 “ fore God in their Integrity, and practise
 “ nothing contrary to their light and con-
 “ viction in his Worship, God is merciful
 “ unto them, although they order not e-
 “ very thing according to the Rule and
 “ Measure of the Word. So was it with them
 “ who came to the Passover in the days of
 “ Heze-

Hezekiah, they had not cleansed themselves, but did eat the Passover otherwise than it was written, 2 Chron. 30. 18.

And, p. 235. He grants that such Forms of Prayer have not any intrinsic evil in the composition of them; but argues against the setting up and prescribing such Forms of Prayer Universally, in opposition, and unto the exclusion of free Prayer.

And, p. 236. * If they appear not contrary unto, or inconsistent with, or are not used in a way exclusive of that work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer which we have described from the Scripture, nor are reducible to any divine prohibition, I shall not contend with any about them.

Mr. Baxters Cure of Church-divisions, I recommend to the reading of such as lie under the temptation of unwarrantable Separation,

paration, as also Mr. *Ball* of that Subject at large. The whole of them is so useful, that I do not think fit to Transcribe any thing of either of them: But I will give you a little of what Mr. *Baxter* hath written, not only as his own judgment, but other Ministers of his converse and acquaintance, in his *Second Plea for Peace*, shewing what *Non-conformity* is not.

Page 100. "We are far from condemning all Forms of Prayer and publick Liturgies as unlawful, of which we have His Majesties Testimony in his *Declaration*, about *Ecclesiastical Affairs*, much more are we far from condemning all the Ancient and present Churches of Christ that have used such, or yet use them, throughout the Christian World; and yet further are we from Separating from them on that account (for using Liturgies) and from encouraging such a Separation.

And

And, p. 101. We think it not unlawful to use as much of the *English* Liturgy as we consented to use, when by His Majesties Commission some of us treated about the Reformation or Alteration of it, viz. in such Assemblies where the Peoples incapacity maketh not such use of it more hurtful then helpful to their Edification. And we joyn with Mr. Ball, and others of the old *Non-conformists*, in thanking God that *England* hath a more reformed Liturgy than most of the Churches in the World. We are far from judging the Parish-Ministers to be no true Ministers of Christ, or the Parish-Churches no true Churches, or judging it unlawful to hold Communion with them.

Mr. Corbett, in his *Account of the Principles and Practices of the Non-conformists*, Page 4. saith, We acknowledge the lawfulness of a Set Form of Liturgy, for mat-

ter agreeable to Gods Word, and suited to the nature of the several Ordinances, and to the necessities of the Church. Yet the Minister should not be so confined to it as not to make use of his own Gifts of Prayer and Exhortation.

Page 8. Moreover we hold not ourselves obliged to forsake a true Church, as no Church for the corruptions and disorders found therein, or to Separate from its Worship for the tolerable faults thereof, while our personal profession of some Errour, or Practice of some Evil, is not required at the Terms of our Communion. Howbeit we are not so indifferent in this matter, as to make no difference between Churches, and Pastors: The more pure and powerful Administration of Gods Ordinances, is to be preferred before that which is more faulty and less effectual: And here again we acknowledge, that in this preference due caution must be used: We must not respect our

own

own particular benefit, before publick Peace
and Order, and the general good.

Page 2. It is our Principle, That Humane
Laws bind the Conscience, or (to speak more
properly) the Subject in point of Conscience,
not by a primary Obigation, as the Laws of
God do, but by a secondary and subordi-
nate, as from a power derived from God. As
it is an evident and important Truth, That
Inferiours ought to obey their Superiours
for Conscience sake; so it is as evident and
important, That when Mens Commands
contradict the Commands of God it is God
and not Man that must have the prehe-
minence in our Obidience.

Page 3. We renounce not Communion
in the publick Worship of the Parish Church-
es, though for its outward Form and Order,
in some respects, it be not that which is most
desirable by us.

Page 4. We have not forsaken the Para-
ochial Assemblies, but have joynd in the

Service of God there performed, and some of us do it in our ordinary course, and others of us have not declined it of set purpose, but as our absence is caused by the necessary Work of the Ministry, wherein we are called. Some of us have Communicated with the said Assemblies in the Sacrament of their Lords Supper. Yet we would not have our Charity and Peaceableness mistaken for an indifference unto Communion with all Parochial Churches and Ministers whatsoever, or for a satisfaction or acquiescence in the whole, and all particulars of the Liturgy, so as to be able to declare our unfeigned Assent and Consent to all and everything therein contained.

Page 36. Whereas a remarkable Writer hath published these words, (We should be reconciled, if the Presbyterian Ministers should persuade their People to do what they could themselves.) We declare to the World that we have joyed in the said Assemblies, and have joined in the Service

we heartily embrace these Terms of Reconciliation; and as we have done already, we will not cease to do our uttermost to persuade them, upon whom we have any influence; and we would gladly come to the Issue, to see which Party should outvie the other in forwardness in allaying the present Distempers, and lessening the Differences, and drawing on towards Peace and Union. We have here done our part to remove the Offences taken at us, by testifying to all Men, that conscientious dissatisfaction, and not Carnal Interest, or a Spirit of opposition, is the ground of our Nonconformity: And to bring such as differ from us to be in more Charity with us, than to judge that we are utterly unworthy or incapable of the publick Ministry, or that such Persons as for ignorance and lewdness are scandalous and contemptible among their Neighbours, are more tolerable in Sacred Office than we are, or that our Mission has been so grossly

gross Insufficiency, Non-residence, and other
 hianous negligence, should be made less Crimi-
 nal than our dissent about the Ceremo-
 nies, Subscriptions, Renunciations, and
 such like Injunctions. We submit what we
 have done to the Wisdom, Pity, and Cle-
 mency of our Governours; we acquiesce
 in Gods Wise and Holy Determinations con-
 cerning us. And we resolve through his
 Grace to abide steadfast and unmoveable in
 our Subjection and Loyalty to our Sov-
 reign, in our due Obedience to those that are
 put in Authority under him, in our earnest
 endeavour of Holiness, Unity, and Peace in
 the Church, in Brotherly love to all Faithful
 Christians, in Charity to all men, and in the
 Faith and Patience of the Disciples and Ser-
 vants of Jesus Christ.

I will only add his Sonc of the 2^d of 1st which I heartily subscribe to, yet I. When the
 higher Powers command what God forbids,
 though we are bound not to perform it,
 yet we must be subject, and not resist, but
 patiently

patiently submit to Suffering. The Cause of
 Religion doth not warrant Subjects to take
 Arms against their lawful Prince, nor may
 they by armed Violence against Authority,
 attempt the publick Reformation thereof.
 We hold, that it is unlawful, by the Constitu-
 tions and Laws of this Kingdom, for any
 Subjects to take Arms against the King, his
 Office, Authority, or Person, or by force of
 Arms to resist any Magistrate or Officer
 legally Commissionated or Authorized by
 him; yea, Subjects are bound not only not
 to resist, but to assist and defend their So-
 veraign with their Estates, and Lives; and
 the Preachers of the Gospel ought to teach
 the People Obedience and Loyalty, and to
 endeavour to root out all Principles of Se-
 dition, Rebellion, and Disobedience. We
 believe that we are under no Bond or Ob-
 ligation to act any thing contrary to these
 sworn Principles. And we further make
 known our detestation of all the Indignity
 and

and Violence offered to the Person of our late Sovereign, and especially that most horrid execrable Fact of taking away his Life, as also the Usurpations and violent change of the Government that did accompany the same, against which Crimes, while they were carried on, the Brethren of our Perswasion openly protested, even to the Faces of the Actors.

And. p. 14. We declare, That we will not endeavour any alteration of the Government in Church or State, as it is in the King, whose Civil and Ecclesiastical Supremacy we have before acknowledged; nor the alteration of the true Episcopal Office which Christ hath settled in his Church; nor will we endeavour any alteration in the Church, by any Seditious or unlawful means, but only by Prayer to God, by humbly petitioning our Superiours, or obeying the King if he Command it, or such like lawful means as belong to us in our Places and Callings.

If the names of *Ball*, *Baxter* and *Corbet*, sound harsh with some of you methinks however the names of *Tomb*, *Nye* and *Owen*, should make a greater figure among you, and be of greater Authority with such as have not patience to hear the *Name*, much less the *Thing* called *Communion*.

If at the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established, *Deut.* 19. 15. Here is the testimony of three of your own, as well as three more of the other side, against such as refuse Communion, with such Ministers and Churches who do much more than I have done.

Will you not hear Mr. *Nye* telling you your duty, That you and your Families should frequent the publick Ministry, That you are obliged to observe the lawful Commands of your Governours, That this principle, that it is unlawful to hear in publick, is a mispersuasion of these latter times set on foot by the Jesuits? Will you not hear Dr. *Owen* telling you that he doth not argue against forms of Prayer as unlawful to be used; That, whilst you make use of them with the true design of Prayer, looking after due assistance unto Prayer, he doth not judge there is any such evil in them, as that God will not Communicate his Spirit to any in the use of them, &c. Will you let me add one more passage in his Preface? I do not say the fatal Consequence of the introduction of human devised set forms of Prayer in the worship of the Church, by the horrible abuse of it, is sufficient to condemn them as absolutely unlawful. Will you have no regard to the Ministers of all persuasions, who tell you by their principles and practices the lawfulness

of what I do? Behold a greater than Dr. Owen, &c. is here, the *Apostle of the Gentiles*, great *Saint Paul*, telling you, that unto the *Jews* he became as a *Jew* that he might gain the *Jews*, &c. To the weak he became as weak that he might gain the weak: I am made all things saith he, to all men, that I might by all means save some, *1 Cor. 9. 20. &c.* And he was so zealous for the saving of Souls that he could condescend to any thing that might be done with a good Conscience. His own practice was the best comment on this Text, in taking *Timothy* to him as his Assistant or fellow-labourer in the Gospel, and *Circumcising him* because of the *Jews* that were in those quarters, for they knew all that his Father was a Greek, *Acts 16. 3.* Here is a piece of condescension indeed; a far greater piece of Conformity than the reading of a form of Prayer. *Timothy* had the repute of a *Gentile*, but becomes a *Jew*, that he might gain the *Jews*: And *Paul* chooseth to make use of him as his partner in his Ministry, that his Preaching might be the more acceptable to the *Jews* in those quarters. See also the advice of *James* and the other Elders to *Paul*, *Acts 21. 18. &c.* when he came to *Jerusalem*. Thou seest Brother how many thousands of *Jews* there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the Law, ver. 20. and they are informed of thee that thou teachest all the *Jews* which are among the *Gentiles* to forsake Moles, saying that they ought not to Circumcise their Children, &c. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four Men which have a vow on them; them take, and purifie thy self with them, that they may shave their heads, and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee

are nothing, but that thou thy self walkest orderly, and keepest the Law, ver. 24. &c. And should not I and other Ministers walk as we have *Paul* for our example? Give me leave to apply this piece of Conformity in him to our present case. You see how many thousands in this Parish and many others are as zealous for Common Prayer (as some very few are zealous against it) and they are misinformed that I and other Nonconformists teach the people Rebellion, and that we instill into them the principles of Schism, and draw them away from the Publick Ministry and Ordinances; Therefore that we may convince gainsayers that these things whereof the people are informed against us are nothing, but that we also walk orderly and keep the Law, I have thought fit to do what I have done in obedience to the Law of the Land, that hereby I may be instrumental of gaining some Souls to Christ of these many thousands that are ready to Perish for lack of knowledge. Remember Mr. Nyes words, that *we are to walk wisely and mercifully towards them that are without.*

Object. If these be your Principles that it is lawful to read and hear Common Prayer, why did you not do it at first and conform as the rest of the Ministers in the Parish Churches?

Answer. I have told you already, if that only had been required of us, we had done it; but other things being required which we account sinful, we rather chose the pleasing of God and the peace of our Consciences in a way of duty, than honours and preferments from men in a way of sin.

Object. If the Common Prayer be read at your meeting-

ing-place, we will rather go to the Parish Church and hear it there.

Answ. If you think you have not enough of it with us, you may go to Church and have more: But if you account what I read too much, you argue perversly in talking of going to them who do more than I have done. But I answer further, I have not, I will not in the least discourage your going to the Publick Assemblies. The same Gospel is Preached with them as with us, and with some of them, I doubt not, more judiciously, and perhaps more profitably than by such as I, and whether may be more prosperous this or that we know not: So be it Christ be Preached here or there, we rejoyce and will rejoyce.

Again, our Assemblies are not set up in opposition to, but in conjunction with, or in subordination to those in Publick; and therefore to such as charge us with setting up Altars and Churches in a way of Rebellion against the Government, and to turn away the people from following the Lord in the way of his Worship in the Parish Churches, I answer as the Tribes of the Children of *Ruben* and the Children of *Gad* and half Tribe of *Manasseh* answered and said (upon a like occasion) unto the heads of the thousands of *Israel* *Josh. 22. The Lord God of Gods, The Lord God of Gods he knoweth and Israel he shall know, if it be in Rebellion or in transgression against the Lord — let the Lord himself require it: And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, in time to come your Children might say unto our Children, saying, what have you to do with the Lord God of Israel?* Our Governours have made the Act of Uniformity, a
Border:

border, a Wall of Separation between us and the Confor-
 mists, who are ready to say, ye have no part with us in the
 Ministerial work or in the Parish Assemblies for the Wor-
 ship of God; If therefore we may not keep up our own
Meetings, when we may not have liberty to Preach in the
Churches, they shall make us to *Cease from fearing the*
Lord.

And again I answer, The Harvest is great, the Labor-
 ers few, and Souls are precious; Go therefore where you
 will, it shall not offend, but please me, if the Net of
 the Gospel may be spread, and bring you into Christ by
 their Ministry or ours. But take heed of this dividing
 principle which some I see are acted by, of forsaking
 the Ministry and Ordinances of Christ, and the Com-
 munion of Saints, as soon as a form of prayer is used in
 any part of their worship: If God accept such worship
 and worshippers, (as no doubt but he doth where they
 lift up holy hands with pure hearts to him) he will not
 be very well pleased with such as reject them: And let
 me intreat you to consider whether this dividing prin-
 ciple will lead you: As soon as our Governours shall be
 pleased to open the Church-doors a little wider, and the
 Non-Conformists shall generally do the same thing that
 now I have done, you will then either repent of your
 Error, or if you persist in it, you will forsake their As-
 semblies also, as soon as a form of Prayer (according to
 your fancy) hath polluted them, and then I dread to
 think where I may quickly find you. Either among the
 deluded Quakers, to cast off all Ministers and Ordi-
 nances; or among the Papists or Atheists, (of the Ro-
 man Religion or no Religion, for they are much alike)

and so to lay aside the common principles of Morality, and act contrary to the very light of Nature as well as Scripture. But I hope better things of you (whom especially and particularly I write this to) even things that accompany Salvation. And therefore as a means for that end I warn you, yea, in the words of the Apostle, Rom. 16. 17. 18: *I beseech you Brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the Doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them; for they that are such, serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

What may be the result of this leading example, God only knows, and time must discover: Be it what it will, I am not much concern'd, *having I trust a good Conscience (in this matter,) in all things willingly to live honestly.* Duty is our part, the Issues or Events of things belong unto God: But something appears above board already.

On the one side the wrathful and prophane, finding me out of the reach of the Conventicle Act, that they cannot hurt me, nor nor hinder my work that way, have this last week put me into the Bishops Court; from whom nothing less than *Excommunication*, yea, and a *Goal*, if possible, can be expected. Though we yeild as far as we can in things lawful, there is no Union, no Peace nor agreement to be had with such men.

On the other side, there are some among our selves of dividing and unpeaceable Principles and Spirits; who seem to be so incurably prejudiced as to resolve they will *have no Communion with such Ministers or Churches*, who in some little things cross their humour, and do therefore

fore begin to excommunicate themselves; before they
 have so much as heard what is to be said in the Case.
 These are people, who are *wiser in their own conceit*
then seven men that can rend a Reason. I have given
 you the names of six already (Nye, Owen, Tombs, Ball,
 Baxter, and Corbet.) I will add a seventh, Dr. Thomas
 Goodwin (*one among the first three of the Independents*)
 who in his Works lately printed in Folio on the *Ephesians*
serm. 36. pag. 488. hath these words. 'Whereas now
 in some of the Parishes of this Kingdom there are ma-
 ny godly men, that do constantly give themselves up
 to the worship of God, and meet together in one place
 to that end, in a constant way, under a godly Minister,
 whom they themselves have chosen to cleave to, though
 they did not choose him at first.) These, notwithstanding
 their mixture and want of discipline, I never thought
 for my part, but that they were true Churches of
 Christ. *Again, pag. 489.* So that I profess myself as
 zealous in this point, as in any other I know: And for
 my part this I say, and I say it with much integrity, I
 never took up Religion by Parties in the lump: I have
 found by trial of all things, that there is some Truth on
 all sides; I have found holiness, where you would lit-
 tle think it, and so likewise Truth: And I have lear-
 ned this principle, which, I hope, I shall never lay down
 till I am swallowed up in immortality, and that is, to
 acknowledge every good thing, and hold communion
 with it in men, in Churches or whatsoever else. My Bre-
 thren, This Rule (which I profess I have lived by and
 shall do while I live) I know I shall never please men in:
 For this is the Nature and condition of all Mankind; if

a man dissent from others in one thing, he crosseth
in all the rest: and therefore if a man take
good of all sides he is apt to cross himself, but he
Christ by it: and so I will for this particular.

To return and to conclude you see how the Church
Christ is divided and broke to pieces by one and the
party abovementioned. I stand alone in the mean
am in danger on both sides: Give me leave to speak
Jehoshaphat's words, *O my God, wilt thou not judge me*
for I have no might against this great Company that are
against me, neither know I what to do, but mine eyes
are upon thee.

I will yet take heart and further encourage myself
from the words of a Soldier, whose valour I feel I
need in this case. *When Joab saw that the front of the*
army was against him, before and behind, he put the
men in array; and said be of good courage, and let us
play the men, for our people, and for the City of our God,
and the Lord do what seemeth him good.

Febr. 23. 1681. From
my Study in great Rus-
sell Street, Bloomsbury.

FINIS